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И ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЙ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ
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**THE ORIGIN OF WORLD WAR II
AND THE PREWAR EUROPEAN POLITICAL
CRISIS OF 1939**

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It will be no exaggeration to say that the problem of the origin of wars invariably holds a prominent place among the numerous problems of historical science. And, indeed, few historians, from Herodotus to our time, have failed to touch, directly or indirectly, upon this problem that so agitates mankind.

The entire progress of historiography convincingly shows that only those investigators, who have firmly stood on the ground of concrete historical facts and been able veraciously to analyse them, succeeded in drawing correct scientific conclusions regarding the origin of wars. And vice versa, those historians who have proceeded from anti-scientific conceptions and theories have found themselves condemned to absolute scientific sterility. Such, for example, are those historians who, following certain sociologists, regard wars as a phenomenon springing from man's biological and psychic make-up. Calumniating mankind, they liken man to beast and allege that it is immanent in man to strive to destroy his fellow men.

Such an approach to the history of mankind in general, and of the origin of wars in particular, naturally rules out the correct scientific explanation of wars. There is no need to prove that such an approach has no affinity with science, and is indeed outside its realm.

At one time the almost prevailing conviction was that wars are made by rulers and conquerors. This was current primarily at the time when history as a science was still in its infancy and when all history of human society was held to be the history of outstanding individuals. This conviction has survived even in our day, but now it is rather the exception than the rule. Not denying the role of individuals in history and correctly appreciating it, modern progressive historical science is far from making a fetish of it and regarding it as all-powerful. Modern historiography investigates all historical phenomena, wars included, in their organic connection with the concrete socio-economic conditions of the development of society, determines and discloses the objective laws of the historical process. History has now become a systematized science capable of viewing the development of society not as a conglomeration of chance occurrences, but as a process possessing its own laws.

Modern progressive historical science, and Soviet historiography particularly, proceeds from the fact that every war is the result of preceding economic and political development, the result of the home and foreign policy of the respective classes and states. Only such an approach makes it possible most fully and correctly to understand the causes of each war, the aims of its participants, and the role and place of the given war in the whole process of the historical development of society.

Profoundly wrong are those researchers, for instance, who try to view world wars as chance occurrences, arising independently of the operation of the laws of the development of contemporary society. To consider that phenomena of such vast import may be brought about by chance causes is to reject, in fact, the scientific explanation of social phenomena, and to reject history as a science. The works of those historians, for example, who seek the *causes* of World War I only in the events of the July crisis of 1914, and the *causes* of World War II only in the events of the spring and summer of 1939, cannot be regarded as really scientific investigations.

The causes of wars, and world wars in particular, mature over a more or less lengthy period. The international political crises that preceded both world wars were not the *causes* of those wars. Both these crises were themselves only the *consequence* of the development of international economic and political relations in the periods preceding these crises.

This, of course, does not mean that the international political crises that preceded the world wars are by themselves of no interest to historians. Their interest in these crises is quite warranted and justified if only for the fact that in them are concentrated, like in focus, the *earlier* economic and political contradictions which brought about the world wars.

In the final analysis, World War II was caused by the economic and political contradictions that had evolved in the period between the two world wars.

The first world war wrought tremendous changes in the destinies of peoples. The victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia ushered in the

world's first socialist state. The deep interest of the state in peaceful conditions for its economic progress, and its consistent struggle for peace among nations, for lasting peaceful coexistence and businesslike cooperation of the two socio-economic systems, capitalism and socialism, were important stabilising factors in international relations after World War I, factors rallying the peaceloving forces of all nations to struggle against wars, for peace and national independence. But the ruling classes of some capitalist countries met with intense hostility the existence and development of this state from its very inception. They endeavoured to destroy the young state by open military intervention, economic blockade and aid to the counter-revolutionary forces inside the country. All these endeavours failed, but the hostile attitude of the ruling circles of leading capitalist countries toward the Soviet state remained and, as subsequent events showed, this most detrimentally affected international relations in the period between the two world wars.

The triumph of the socialist Revolution was a most striking and decisive manifestation of the peoples' protest against social injustice and war. A powerful movement for peace and social progress unfolded in almost all countries. This law-governed historical phenomenon, generated by the whole development of society, was met with fear and hatred by those circles in the capitalist countries who for their own selfish gains were interested in wars, in preserving social and national oppression. Their fear of the growing progressive movements of the peoples found expression in the home and foreign policies of many countries and profoundly influenced their approach to current international problems.

Most important among the problems after World War I were, specifically, the attitude of capitalist states towards the Soviet socialist state, the relations between the victor and the vanquished countries, the relations between the victor countries themselves, and, lastly, the problems stemming from the relations between metropolises, on the one hand, and the colonial and dependent countries, on the other. And these problems to a large extent determined the course of history between the first and the second world wars.

A rather unstable and temporary balance of power evolved in the capitalist world after World War I, which found political expression in the post-war Versailles-Washington system of international relations. This balance of power was not stable and permanent because the uneven development of the capitalist countries led, in the course of time, to sharp changes in the correlation of forces.

All this intensely aggravated the economic and political contradictions inside the capitalist world, led to its splitting into two opposing alignments, and, finally, to war between them. The over-riding cause of the war was the contradictions between Germany, Japan and Italy on the one hand, and Britain, France and the USA on the other.

As to Europe, the dominating factor was the political and economic contradictions between Germany on the one hand and Britain and France on the other. Matured and developed for two decades these contradictions found expression in industrial and trade rivalry on the world market, and in the struggle of German monopoly capital for the return of its old colonies and "spheres of interests" and the acquisition of new ones. In the years

immediately preceding the second world war, these contradictions were augmented by contradictions arising from the arms race, and direct acts of aggression in Europe, Asia and Africa by Hitler Germany and her Axis allies.

Responsible circles, who played a leading part in the economic and political life of the Western countries, realised the danger spelled to their countries by Germany's growing economic and military strength, and from the very first post-war years began to try to divert that danger from themselves. They hoped to accomplish this by two mutually exclusive, it would seem, approaches to the German problem. Firstly, by all kinds of economic and political restrictions imposed on Germany after the first world war; secondly, by extensive aid to the restoration of Germany's war-industrial potential and by a policy of "appeasement" and "channeling" of German aggression.

The simultaneous existence of these two approaches to the German problem may at first seem a paradox. But this may seem so only if we examine these approaches separately. In reality, however, they were never separate, for not only did they not preclude each other, they were interwoven and mutually conditioned. They found expression in the Treaty of Versailles, in the decisions of the Locarno Conference, in the Dawes Plan, in the Young Plan, and in other acts, connected directly or indirectly with the attempts of the Western powers to solve the German problem.

By their restrictions the Western leaders calculated to ensure a certain economic and political control over Germany in order to derive economic advantage for themselves, and at the same time to direct Germany's

entire policy into a channel suitable to them. But it soon became evident that from the point of view of certain Western statesmen this ideal solution of the German problem ran up against serious obstacles. The economic burdens imposed on the German people were rapidly raising their revolutionary spirit. This was indicated with sufficient conviction by the 1923 events in Germany. The movement of the German people against foreign economic control embraced the most diverse sections of the population. Not only the broad masses of the people but industrial, trade and financial circles of Germany took part in it. Under these circumstances, further direct economic pressure upon Germany became dangerous. In this situation the Dawes Plan came into existence.

Underlying this plan was an endeavour to adjust the German problem in such a way as, without completely abandoning economic control over Germany, to give her the possibility of restoring her war-industrial potential with the aim of subsequently directing German economic and military expansion towards the East. This adjustment, according to the plan's sponsors, was to stabilize the internal situation in Germany and ensure the possibility of her vigorous participation in joint actions of the Western powers against the Soviet Union.

The Dawes Plan cleared the way to an increased influx and infiltration of foreign (chiefly American) capital into German industry. Foreign credits and loans enabled Germany rapidly to restore and develop her heavy industry and first and foremost the metallurgical and war industries of the Ruhr. With the aid of the Western powers, primarily the USA and Great Britain, the German revanchists obtained the weapons neces-

sary for aggression. Thus, the restoration of German imperialism's war potential was a most important prerequisite for German aggression.

Helping to restore the German war potential the Western circles calculated that they would succeed in directing German economic and territorial expansion against the Soviet Union, and thereby prevent German expansion to the West. But as subsequent events showed, these calculations proved to be illusory.

With the growth of Germany's war potential there also grew the economic rivalry between Germany and the Western countries, and her insistent demands for "Lebensraum," for colonies and markets, for European and world hegemony. All these demands swelled to gigantic proportions especially after Hitler came to power.

Hitler's anti-communist line enabled him to keep up in certain Western circles the belief that future German aggression would develop towards the Soviet Union. This belief largely explains the policy of "appeasement" pursued by the Western powers with regard to Hitler Germany and her Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis partners.

Far from counteracting Germany's open violation of the Versailles Treaty, responsible Western statesmen by their policy directly facilitated it. British politicians even went so far as to violate the Versailles Treaty jointly with Germany by concluding a naval agreement with her in 1935. Without any real counteraction on the part of Great Britain and France, Hitler Germany in 1935 annulled the war clauses of the Versailles Treaty and restored the aggressive Wehrmacht, and in 1936 remilitarised the Rhineland, thus trampling not only on the Versailles Treaty but also the guaranteeing of the Locarno Pact.

With the obvious connivance of Great Britain, France and the USA, the aggressive powers—Germany, Italy and Japan—were able to prepare and perpetrate aggression against China, Ethiopia, Spain, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Thus, by the beginning of the prewar 1939 European political crisis, the war was in fact already being waged by the aggressors on a vast expanse from Gibraltar to Shanghai, embracing over five hundred million people.

This course of events became possible because the Western powers, pursuing a policy of non-intervention, made it easier for the aggressors to do their nefarious work. Responsibility for this rests alike on the ruling circles of Great Britain and France, as on the reactionary forces of the USA. Under the guise of isolationism the latter, in fact, supported the aggressors. This among other things found expression in the neutrality act adopted in the USA in 1935 which placed the aggressors and their victims on the same level. It prohibited exports of arms, ammunition and other war materiel to the belligerents and even to neutral countries which might transmit these armaments to the belligerents. In the concrete historical situation of that time it meant that the countries which needed arms to defend their independence, as Ethiopia or Spain, for instance, were to be deprived of the possibility to get them from the USA. The significance of this fact will be especially clear if we bear in mind that the poorly-armed people of Ethiopia and Spain had to fight against aggressors who were armed to the teeth and had ample supplies of all modern weapons.

Thus United States "neutrality" in Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, and the German-Italian intervention in

Spain was sham neutrality. In reality the position of the United States was directed against the victims of aggression and wholly favouring the fascist aggressors.

While refusing to counteract the fascist aggression, the reactionary circles of the USA continued to seek ways to establish close collaboration with Hitler Germany. Significant in this respect is the secret conference held on November 23, 1937, in San Francisco with the participation of fascist emissaries (Baron von Tippleskirch and Baron von Killinger) and leading American industrialists and congressmen (Senator A. Wandenbergh, General Motors Chief Alfred P. Sloan, Lamont DuPont and others. The conference discussed a wide range of questions, including that of establishing German-American collaboration in the fight for gigantic Russian and Chinese markets.¹

This conference was followed by other meetings and talks, and by visits to Europe, and Germany particularly, by Herbert Hoover and Senator Burke, and to the United States by Hitler's personal adjutant Wiedemann, by Ribbentrop's personal representative Herhardt Westric, a big business man, by Princess Hohenlohe and others. Nor were official American representatives idle. Under-Secretary of State Sumner Welles, the American Ambassador in Paris William Bullitt, Ambassador in Berlin Hugh Wilson, Ambassador in London, Kennedy, Ambassador in Tokyo G. Grew and some other responsible State Department officials were no less active supporters of the "Munich policy" than their British and French colleagues.

Highly influential monopoly capital circles, a number of prominent isolationist members of Congress, and State

¹ See "Congressional Record," August 20, 1942, A 3134.

Department officials brought to bear direct pressure on President Roosevelt, and sharply opposed his measures which in some degree were directed against the fascist aggressors.

The attitude of the American reactionary circles towards the impending war in Europe was determined by their calculations that it would weaken the European countries and enable the USA as it did in World War I to batten on war orders and credits, then come forward with new forces, assume the role of arbiter and try to dictate an "American peace" to enfeebled Europe. And they particularly hoped that it might be possible to crush the Soviet socialist state and at its expense solve many contradictions of the capitalist world. In this, the position of American reactionary forces coincided with that of the ruling circles of England and France.

By all their prewar policy the ruling circles of England, France and the United States demonstrated their unwillingness to curb the German, Italian and Japanese aggressors, their unwillingness to defend the violated rights of the peoples, safeguard peace and halt the impending second world war. Up to the very beginning of the war they stubbornly rejected the efforts of the Soviet Union for the creating of an effective system of collective security against aggression because such a system was fundamentally opposed to the objective of their "appeasement" and "non-intervention" policy. Throughout the prewar years the Soviet Union time and again offered clear and concrete proposals for collective security.

Literally a few days after Hitler seized power in Germany, the Soviet Union in February 1933 proposed to the General Commission on Disarmament that all coun-

tries sign a declaration defining aggression and the aggressor. The Soviet draft enumerated the actions which all states would regard as acts of aggression with all ensuing consequences. The Soviet proposal pursued only one aim: to prevent aggression and promote the strengthening of peace. Adoption of the Soviet proposal would have been an important step towards establishing a system of collective security. But this proposal was rejected. That same year, 1933, the USSR made great diplomatic efforts for the conclusion of a so-called Eastern Pact, designed as a serious obstacle to German aggression. All efforts exerted by Soviet diplomacy as well as by French Foreign Minister Louis Bartou did not culminate in concluding the "Eastern Pact." This was prevented by the fact that Germany, directly encouraged by Britain, refused to join the pact. So did Poland as well as some of the other supposed participants.

The Soviet Union invariably sponsored and championed collective security also in the League of Nations. It firmly and consistently upheld the principles of collective security in the discussions of such important questions as the Italian aggression against Ethiopia, the Italo-German intervention in Spain, and on all other occasions.

In the interests of safeguarding peace in Europe the Soviet Union in 1935 concluded mutual assistance treaties with France and Czechoslovakia. These treaties could have played an important part in laying the foundations for collective security. But subsequent events showed that the then French and Czechoslovak governments had no desire to carry out the treaties concluded with the Soviet Union, had no desire to make these treaties a basis for a system of collective security in Europe.

At the time Hitler seized Austria the Soviet Union vigorously opposed the fascist aggression, and proposed that an international conference be called at once to discuss the possible consequences of the seizure of Austria, and to work out the necessary measures for stopping the further expansion of aggression and removing the increased danger of a new world war. This proposal, however, did not meet with the support of the Western powers.

The facts show that the essence of the policy of the Western powers consisted not in uniting the forces of the peace-loving countries for joint struggle against aggression, but in isolating the Soviet Union and directing German aggression against the Soviet Union, using Hitler as a tool for their purposes.

The climax of the policy of conniving at and abetting the aggressor was the Munich Agreement of September 1938. Behind the back of the Czechoslovak people the fate of Czechoslovakia was decided by a compact between the governments of Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy, aimed at impelling Hitler aggression to Eastern Europe, primarily to the USSR.

The Munich Agreement was greeted with indignation and emphatic condemnation in the democratic circles of various countries. The peoples could not but realise that the deal with the aggressors at the expense of Czechoslovakia was fraught with the gravest consequences to peace. But the betrayal of Czechoslovakia to Hitler was not the end of it. On September 30, 1938, an Anglo-German declaration of non-aggression was signed by Chamberlain and Hitler in Munich. On December 6, 1938, Bonnet and Ribbentrop signed a similar Franco-German declaration in Paris. Essentially these

agreements meant that both Britain and France had concluded pacts of non-aggression with Hitler.

Through all the phases of the Czechoslovak tragedy, the Soviet Union alone of all the Great Powers vigorously championed the independence and the national rights of Czechoslovakia. The Soviet government had publicly announced its readiness to come to Czechoslovakia's aid against Germany in accordance with terms of the mutual assistance treaty which provided that France should come to Czechoslovakia's aid simultaneously. France, however, refused to discharge her duty.

Under Anglo-French pressure and fearing the assistance of the Soviet Union more than the Hitler aggression, the Czechoslovak government of that time declined to accept the military aid offered by the Soviet Union, unless such aid was rendered also by France.

In Munich when Hitler received from Britain and France important Czechoslovak territories, he stinted no promises to make future territorial changes in Europe only by agreement with Britain and France. As subsequent events showed these promises were absolutely worthless. Encouraged by the Munich compact the fascist states with redoubled persistence started to prepare fresh aggressions, and in March 1939 the Hitlerites seized all of Czechoslovakia, with the Western powers not even so much as lifting a finger against it. Simultaneously with this, Hitler Germany began energetically to make on Britain, France and other countries more and more political and economic demands pertaining to the revision of the state borders in Europe, giving Germany colonies, lessening British competition on the world markets, etc.

On the eve of World War II Germany held second

place, after the USA, in the capitalist world, for the volume of industrial production. In 1938 she accounted for 12 per cent of the capitalist world's total output. Germany produced 22 per cent of the world's pig iron; 24 per cent steel; 17 per cent coal; 14 per cent machines.¹ In the important manufacture of synthetic products (including synthetic nitrogen, gasoline and rubber), metal-working machine tools, aluminium and some other items, she advanced to first place. Germany was fast outstripping the USA and other countries in machine exports (26 per cent of the world total), chemicals, optics, ferrous metals (21 per cent of the world total in 1937), steel (22 per cent of the world total in 1937).²

Germany's position had grown considerably stronger on the European market. On the eve of the war she already held first place in coal exports to European countries, and four times exceeded the United States in ferrous metals exports. At the expense of the USA and Great Britain, Germany's trade with the countries of Western and especially Eastern and Southeastern Europe greatly expanded from 1929 to 1938.

Germany spread out also on the markets of the Latin American countries, stepping up her share in their foreign trade from 11.5 per cent in 1933 to 17.1 per cent in 1938. She rose to second place in the total imports of the Latin American countries, and, elbowing out the USA, she advanced to first place in that of Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay. German capital and goods made

their way to China, to the countries of South Asia and to the Far East.

Anglo-German contradictions became particularly acute on the colonial question. Germany's intensified economic expansion in the British colonies (especially in Africa), and the Hitlerites' direct demands for British possessions seriously alarmed the British ruling circles.

All this shows how intense the contradictions between Germany and the other capitalist countries had grown. They became particularly acute on the eve of the second world war in connection with the new economic crisis which in 1937 first of all gripped the USA, Britain and France.

A significant manifestation of the economic crisis was the decline of industrial output. In 1938 it had dropped, compared with 1937, in the United States by 23 per cent, in Great Britain by 6 per cent, in France by 7.5 per cent.¹ Especially significant was the decline in such important lines as machine-building, steel, pig iron and coal. Steel output went down in 1938 in the United States by 44 per cent, in Great Britain by 20 per cent. In France in 1937 it was nearly 17 per cent below 1929, and in 1938, 22 per cent below 1937.² Pig iron production in 1938 fell almost by 50 per cent in the USA, 21 per cent in Great Britain, 24 per cent in France.³ The output of coal in 1938 was reduced by 22 per cent in the United States, 10 per cent in Great Britain. In the same year machine and equipment production fell by 36 per cent

¹ See "Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich, 1941-42."

² "Monatliche Nachweise über den Auswärtigen Handel Deutschlands," XII, 1948, S. 252, 286.

¹ "Statistical Year Book of the League of Nations. 1939-1940," pp. 164-165.

² Ibid., p. 145.

³ Ibid., p. 144.

in the United States, 6 per cent in Great Britain, 3 per cent in France.¹

Under the conditions of the economic crisis and rapidly growing contradictions with Germany, the ruling circles of England sought ways and means for a far-reaching agreement with Hitler. This is evidenced, inter alia, by the negotiations held in October and November 1938 in London with a German trade delegation headed by Rüter. An active part in these talks on the British side was taken by Leith-Ross, Ashton-Gwatkin and representatives of the Federation of British industries. These talks dealt with questions of tariffs and of generally reducing Anglo-German competition, of forming an Anglo-German coal cartel and other economic matters. Settlement of these economic issues was considered as a means of reaching a broad political agreement. This was plainly pointed out by Leith-Ross in his conversation with Rüter: "...official conferences on economic pacification could not stand on their own but must be included in the larger framework of a general political pacification."²

The same objectives were pursued by negotiations held in the latter part of November 1938 in London between Schacht, on the one hand, and British Board of Trade President Stanley, Bank of England Director Montague Norman, and Leith-Ross, on the other. Also in November 1938, negotiations on the colonial question were held in Berlin by Secretary of War of the Union of South Africa Oswald Pirrow with Hitler and Ribbentrop.

¹ Statistical Year Book of the League of Nations, pp. 137, 164.

² "Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945," Series D., IV, No. 267.

In these November talks Hitler Germany pressed on Britain to wrest from her fresh concessions affecting her economic and colonial interests. Faced with this pressure, the British ruling circles strove to reach agreement with Hitler's representatives that Germany should seek satisfaction of her economic and territorial claims not at the expense of the West but at the expense of the Soviet Union. It was not fortuitous that precisely at this time the possibility of Hitler Germany seizing Soviet Ukraine was strongly mooted in London.

Referring to the position of British ruling circles on this question, the German Ambassador in London informed his government on January 3, 1939, that in England "it is realised more and more that Germany, since Munich, *has become* the preponderating power on the continent of Europe; and this realisation is coupled with a readiness to acknowledge the fact. Indeed, even more than this, a further German penetration towards the Ukraine, whose conquest by Germany is firmly believed in Great Britain to be timed for the spring of 1939, would be accepted."¹

Highly illustrative of that period are the talks held in March 1939 in Düsseldorf between representatives of the Federation of British Industries and that of the German Reich industrial group. As a result of these negotiations, on the day when Hitler entered Prague, an agreement was signed in Düsseldorf, whose aim according to the joint statement by the participants of the conversations, was "the intention to guarantee a closer co-operation of industrial systems of their countries."

All these negotiations disclosed not only the striving

¹ "Documents on German Foreign Policy," Vol. IV, No. 286.

of the British ruling circles for a broad political and economic agreement with Hitler Germany, but also the tremendous difficulties in the way of reaching such an agreement. Considering Britain's readiness to come to such an agreement, the Hitlerites began to put forward ever bigger demands affecting her direct interests, and simultaneously pushed their aggressive actions in Europe. Following the seizure of Czechoslovakia, whose frontiers after Munich were guaranteed by the governments of Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy, the Hitlerites on March 22, 1939, forced Lithuania to sign an agreement ceding Memel region to the Germans. The next day, on March 23, a German-Rumanian agreement was concluded which converted Rumania into an agrarian appendage of fascist Germany. Lastly, in March of the same year, Germany demanded that Poland should surrender Danzig to her and grant the Germans extraterritorial highways and a railroad in the Polish Corridor. Germany's ally, fascist Italy, too, was not lagging in aggression behind her partner: on April 14, Italian troops seized Albania.

All this showed that the fascist aggressors were driving hard to expand their economic, political and military positions for unleashing a war. International relations manifestly entered a prewar political crisis.

In this situation the British and the French governments began to undertake certain manoeuvres to strengthen their political positions with a view of creating for themselves better conditions in their negotiations with Hitler Germany. To that end they undertook in March and April 1939 such measures as giving guarantees to Rumania, Poland, Greece and Turkey. Characterising those measures Dirksen, the German Ambassador in

London, qualified them as a "two-action policy" (Zwillingpolitik). The aims of that policy were absolutely clear to German diplomacy. "...England wants," Dirksen wrote, "by means of armament and the acquisition of allies to make herself strong and equal to the Axis, but at the same time she wants by means of negotiation to seek an adjustment with Germany...."¹

It was to this aim that Britain and France subordinated their negotiations with the Soviet Union, to which they attached incomparably less importance than to their negotiations with Germany.

This is sufficiently evidenced by their position in the Moscow negotiations of 1939.

On March 18, 1939, the British Ambassador to Moscow Seeds informed the Soviet government on behalf of his government that there were serious grounds to fear violence against Rumania on the part of Hitler Germany and asked what the Soviet Union's position would be in that event. When the question was raised by the Soviet side as to what Britain's position would be under those circumstances, Seeds evaded a reply with the remark that Rumania was geographically closer to the Soviet Union than to England. Such an answer signified only one thing: the British ruling circles were endeavouring to bind the Soviet Union to definite commitments while standing aloof themselves. This endeavour was manifest throughout the whole course of the negotiations.

As for the Soviet government it treated the inquiry of the British government with all possible seriousness

¹ "Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War," Vol. II, Dirksen Papers (1938-1939), No. 29.

and responsibility. In reply to this inquiry the Soviet government suggested that a conference be called of representatives of the most interested states, namely, Great Britain, France, Rumania, Poland, Turkey and the USSR. In the opinion of the Soviet government such a conference would offer the best opportunity to ascertain the real state of affairs and determine the position of each of the participants. The British government, however, replied that it considered the Soviet proposal premature.¹ Thus it was through the position of the British government that the conference proposed by the Soviet government did not take place and the opportunity of taking an important step towards the organisation of collective security against Hitler aggression in Europe was missed.

Having declined the proposal for a conference, the British government on its part proposed to sign together with the USSR, France and Poland a joint declaration in which the signatory governments would obligate themselves "...to consult together as to what steps should be taken to offer joint resistance..." in case of a threat to the "...independence of any European state...."² This proposal was made by the British government on March 21, 1939. The very next day, March 22, 1939, the Soviet government through its plenipotentiary (Ambassador) to Great Britain agreed to sign the declaration. But this four-power declaration was not signed either as already on April 1, 1939, the British Ambassa-

dor in Moscow intimated that the British government considered, "the question of a joint declaration as having lapsed."¹

Two weeks later, on April 15, 1939, the British Foreign Secretary Halifax, through Ambassador Seeds, proposed that the Soviet government should *alone* issue a statement declaring that "in the event of any act of aggression against any European neighbour of the Soviet Union which was resisted by the country concerned, the assistance of the Soviet government would be available if desired...."² Britain, however, would not assume any obligations with the Soviet Union.

On the eve of this British proposal, the government of France made a proposal to the Soviet Union. In contrast to the British government which would have the USSR issue a unilateral declaration, the French government suggested a bilateral declaration by France and the USSR. On April 14, 1939, the French Foreign Minister Bonnet handed the Soviet plenipotentiary in Paris a draft declaration, saying:

"If France should be in a state of war with Germany in consequence of assistance she rendered Poland or Rumania, the USSR would render France immediate assistance and support.

"If the USSR should be in a state of war with Germany in consequence of assistance rendered to Poland or Rumania, France would render the USSR immediate assistance and support.

"Both governments will without delay accord the

¹ "Izvestia," No. 68 (6838), March 28, 1939.

² Archives of USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See also "Documents on British Foreign Policy." Third Series, Vol. IV, No. 446.

¹ Archives of USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

² Ibid. See also "Documents on British Foreign Policy." Third series, Vol. V, No. 170.

forms of this assistance and take all measures to ensure its full effectiveness.”²

The underlying meaning of both the British and French proposals was that in the event of an act of aggression on the part of Germany through the Baltic countries the Soviet Union would have to go to war with Germany single-handed. The British and French proposals would have the Soviet Union render assistance to Poland and Rumania. But even in this case Britain refused to assume any *joint* obligations with the Soviet Union. Another circumstance that could not help attracting attention was that the British proposal and the French draft envisaged no commitments with regard to rendering assistance to the Soviet Union by Poland and Rumania as well as by the Baltic states.

In answer to the British proposal of April 15, and to the French draft of April 14, 1939, the Soviet government made a proposal handed by the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs to the British Ambassador in Moscow Seeds on April 17, 1939, and by the Soviet Ambassador in Paris to French Foreign Minister Bonnet on April 19, 1939.²

This proposal provided first, that the Soviet Union, Britain and France should mutually undertake to render one another every immediate assistance, including military, in the event of aggression in Europe against any of the contracting parties: secondly, that the Soviet Union, Britain and France should undertake to render every assistance, including military, to the states of

Eastern Europe situated between the Baltic and the Black Seas, and bordering on the Soviet Union, in the event of aggression against these states; thirdly, that the Soviet Union, Britain and France should undertake to determine without delay the extent and forms of military assistance to be rendered in both aforesaid instances.

Such were the salient points of the Soviet proposal, which envisaged really effective measures of counter-acting aggression on the basis of a system of collective security.

For three weeks the British government gave no reply to the Soviet proposal. Meanwhile the events in Europe were growing patently dangerous. On April 28, 1939, Hitler Germany renounced the Anglo-German naval agreement of June 18, 1935. At the same time she annulled the German-Polish non-aggression pact of January 26, 1934.

Notwithstanding the threatening situation, the British government did not deem it necessary to accept the Soviet proposals for the conclusion of a Soviet-Anglo-French mutual assistance agreement, and on May 8, 1939, again proposed that the Soviet government should make a *unilateral* declaration in which it “...would undertake that in the event of Great Britain and France being involved in hostilities in fulfilment of these obligations (by this time Great Britain and France had assumed obligations towards Belgium, Poland, Rumania, Greece and Turkey—A.N.), the assistance of the Soviet government would be immediately available if desired and would be afforded in such manner and on such terms as might be agreed.”¹

¹ Archives of USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹ Archives of USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See also “Documents on British Foreign Policy,” Vol. V. No. 183.

² Archives of USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Thus, this British proposal, like its preceding ones, called only for *unilateral* obligations of the Soviet Union, placing it in an unequal position. It is clear that such a proposal could not serve as a basis for organising a resistance front of the peace-loving states against further aggression in Europe. This was clearly pointed out by the Soviet government in its reply of May 14, 1939. Assessing the British proposal, the Soviet government noted:

"1. The British proposals do not comprise the principle of reciprocity with regard to the USSR and puts it in an unequal position, as they do not provide for British and French obligations to guarantee the USSR in the event of a direct attack upon it by aggressors, whereas Great Britain, France as well as Poland have such a guarantee on the basis of the reciprocity existing between them.

"2. The British proposals extend the guarantee of the East-European states bordering on the USSR only to Poland and Rumania, in view of which the northwestern frontiers of the USSR with Finland, Estonia and Latvia remain open."

"3. The absence of British and French guarantees to the USSR in the event of a direct attack by aggressors, on the one hand, and the fact that the Soviet northwestern frontiers remain open, on the other hand, may serve to provoke aggression towards the Soviet Union."

The Soviet reply specified the concrete conditions necessary for creating an effective barrier to any further aggression in Europe:

"1) The conclusion between Great Britain and France and the USSR of an effective pact of mutual assistance against aggression:

"2) The guaranteeing by these three Great Powers of

the States of Central and Eastern Europe threatened by aggression, including also Latvia, Estonia and Finland.

"3) The conclusion of a concrete agreement between Great Britain, France and the USSR as to forms and extent of assistance to be rendered mutually to each other and to the guaranteed states, without which (without such an agreement) there is a risk that, as experience of Czechoslovakia proved, pacts of mutual assistance may be ineffective."¹

Acceptance of these Soviet proposals by the British and French governments would at last have broken the deadlock of the negotiations and would undoubtedly have contributed to the creation of an effective system of collective security against Hitler aggression in Europe. This was all the more necessary because the political situation in Europe was growing ever tenser: on May 22, 1939, Germany and Italy concluded a military-political alliance. The Chamberlain government of Great Britain, however, supported by the French government, continued its line of procrastinating and frustrating the Moscow negotiations. This line was sharply criticised by public opinion. Under the pressure of this criticism the British and the French governments on May 27, 1939 at last advanced new proposals which were a slight improvement on their previous variant, but still left open the essentially important question for the Soviet Union of guarantees for the Baltic Republics bordering on the Soviet Union's northwestern frontier. A further exchange of proposals between the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and Great Britain and France, on the other, manifestly

¹ Archives of USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See also "Documents on British Foreign Policy," Vol. V, No 520.

revealed the endeavour of the British and French governments to evade concrete obligations under a mutual assistance pact with the USSR.

It went so far that the British and French governments began to object even to the Soviet proposal of including into the projected mutual assistance treaty a clause saying that the three states undertake, in the event of joint actions against aggression, to conclude an armistice or peace only by joint agreement.

The necessity of such a clause in a treaty of alliance and mutual assistance was evident to everyone who really desired the creation of a stable coalition for counteracting aggression. Yet the proposals handed over to V. M. Molotov on June 15, 1939, by British and French Ambassadors Seeds and Nadgiar and Strang who also took part in the negotiations, rejected this point of the Soviet proposals under the pretext that it was allegedly premature to discuss it "...before the circumstances which produced the war are known" and before "agreement is reached on other points still outstanding."¹

The insincerity of the British and French position in the negotiations with the USSR could not, naturally, be passed by unnoticed. The very next day, June 16, 1939, the Soviet government in its reply stated that on the question of concluding an armistice or peace otherwise than by common accord it maintains its position: "inasmuch as it is unable to conceive that any of the contracting parties should have the right, at the very height of defensive military operations against an

aggressor, to conclude a separate agreement with the aggressor behind the back of and against its allies."² Only after this energetic reply of the Soviet Union did the appropriate clause at last appear in the Anglo-French drafts.

Compelled under the pressure of public opinion to improve their drafts in some degree the British and French governments still continued to adhere to their previous line and hedged in their proposals with such reservations which they knew would make them unacceptable to the Soviet Union. This found expression, *inter alia*, in their stand on the question of guarantees to the Baltic countries in the event of direct or indirect aggression against them.

The attitude of the British and French governments in the course of the Moscow negotiations conclusively proved that these governments were not really interested in the conclusion of an effective mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union. This was most fully revealed during the negotiations of military missions of Great Britain, France and the USSR, in August, 1939, in Moscow.

These talks were held on the initiative of the Soviet government. A respective proposal was made by V. M. Molotov on July 23, 1939 to British and French representatives Seeds, Nadgiar and Strang. As further events showed the British and French governments, though formally taking part in military negotiations, did everything to prevent their success.

Despite the great urgency of the negotiations, dictated

¹ Archives of USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See also "Documents on British Foreign Policy," Vol. VI. Annex I to No. 35.

² Archives of USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See also "Documents on British Foreign Policy," Vol. VI, No. 69.

by the threatening situation rising in Europe, the British and French military missions were in no hurry to come to Moscow. Suffice it to say that they did not deem it necessary to go by air and preferred a slow steamboat. Thus it took them six days to reach Moscow. Both the British and the French military missions were composed of men of secondary rank, who, furthermore, had not been authorised by their governments to sign any agreement.¹

Altogether different was the Soviet military mission. It was headed by People's Commissar of Defence, Marshal of the Soviet Union K. E. Voroshilov. Members of the mission were: People's Commissar of the Navy, Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army and his deputy, and Chief of the Red Army Air Force. In contrast to the British and French missions the Soviet military mission was authorised not only to conduct nego-

¹ That the British ruling circles had no desire to conclude an effective military agreement with the USSR was well known to German diplomacy. On August 1, 1939, German Ambassador to London Dirksen reported to Berlin: "The continuation of the negotiations for a pact with Russia, in spite of—or rather just because of—the dispatch of a military mission, is regarded here" (i. e., in London—*A. N.*) with scepticism. This is borne out by the composition of the British military mission: the admiral, until now Commandant of Portsmouth, is practically in retirement, and was never on the staff of the Admiralty; the general is likewise purely a combatant officer; the air general is an outstanding aviator and air instructor, but not a strategist. This indicates that the object of the military mission is more to ascertain the fighting value of the Soviet Army than to make operational arrangements." ("Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War," Vol. II; Dirksen Papers, No. 21.)

tiations but also to sign any military convention resulting from those negotiations.

A clear idea of the functions and tasks of the British and French military missions is afforded by the official instructions for the guidance of the British mission in its talks with the Soviet military mission. The memorandum setting forth these instructions is a fairly voluminous document, containing 117 Articles.¹

It begins by ordering coordination of the instructions of the British military mission with those of the French military mission. "It is the intention," the memorandum reads, "that the two delegations shall work as one in all but name."² It is noteworthy that in the course of the talks in Moscow the British and French missions acted in all matters as one Anglo-French delegation, with the representatives of Great Britain setting the tone in this joint delegation.

The extent of the powers of the British and French military missions were defined by the instructions as follows: "It will be realized, of course, that the delegates are to act as negotiators only and that final agreement to any military convention rests with the governments of France and Great Britain."³ In other words, these military missions, as already noted, had no authority to sign a military convention.

The memorandum pointed out that there were serious difficulties in conducting military negotiations with the Soviet government, "especially in the absence of a preliminary political agreement." Next followed

¹ "Documents on British Foreign Policy," Vol. VI, Appendix V.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Article 8 which deserves special attention. It was couched thus: "Until such time as the political agreement is concluded, the Delegation should therefore *go very slowly with the conversations* (my italics—A. N.), watching the progress of the political negotiations and keeping in very close touch with His Majesty's Ambassador." ¹

The tragic import of this Article can hardly be overestimated if one bears in mind that the British and French military "united delegation" was to be guided by it in the decisive negotiations, which began in Moscow on August 12, 1939, that is, less than twenty days before the unleashing of the second world war by Hitler Germany. This Article alone already explains the reason for the slowness and fruitlessness of the military negotiations between Great Britain, France and the USSR in 1939.

Unfortunately for mankind, the British and French military missions followed this Article most scrupulously. The diplomatic representatives of Great Britain and France, who took part in drawing up a political agreement in Moscow, acted in like manner.

It is patently manifest from the instructions that the British government generally did not want the conclusion of a military convention with the Soviet Union, generally did not want to undertake any commitments of a military character. Article 15 of the instructions to the military mission ordered: "Endeavours should therefore be made to confine the military agreement to the broadest possible terms. Something on the lines of an agreed statement of policy may meet the case". ²

¹ "Documents on British Foreign Policy," Vol. VI, Appendix V.

² Ibid.

The significance of this Article becomes especially clear in the light of Article 18, which plainly says: "...these are signs that the Russians really desire the conclusion of both the political and military agreements." ¹

The unwillingness to have a lasting military alliance with the USSR was fully revealed in the Moscow negotiations during the discussion of the question as to what armed forces the parties to the agreement were to put in the field immediately in the event of aggression. The English named a ridiculous figure, stating that they could put in the field only five infantry divisions and one mechanised division. And this the British proposed at a time when the Soviet Union had declared that it was prepared to send into action against the aggressor 136 divisions, 5,000 medium and heavy guns, up to 10,000 tanks and whippets, over 5,000 war planes, etc.

On other questions too, the line of the Anglo-French military mission was in fact designed to thwart the negotiations. Thus, for example, on such a cardinal question as the passage of the Soviet troops through Poland and the Baltic countries in the event of joint military actions with Great Britain and France in counteracting aggression, the Soviet delegation did not succeed in getting the support of the British and French missions.

The Soviet Union had every ground to consider that, having no common frontier with Germany, it could give military assistance to its allies in the event of war, only if its troops could pass through the territories of the respective states. Without that the USSR would be physically deprived of the possibility to fulfil its allied obli-

¹ "Documents on British Foreign Policy," Vol. VI, Appendix V.

gations to France and Great Britain. The British and French governments could not but appreciate the justice of this request of the USSR. Only their deliberate unwillingness to have an effective military alliance with the USSR can explain their stubborn opposition to this legitimate and natural request of their future ally.

The position of the Western military missions on the question of the passage of troops through the territories of states neighbouring on the USSR was fully determined by the general policy of the governments whose interests they represented in Moscow. This policy found direct reflection in the instructions for the guidance of their military missions. Article 16 of these instructions prescribed: "If the Russians propose that the British and French governments should communicate to the Polish, Rumanian or Baltic states proposals involving cooperation with the Soviet Government or General Staff, the delegation should not commit themselves but refer home."¹

It is interesting to note that the British and French governments endeavoured officially to motivate this attitude with regard to the passage of Soviet troops through Poland by the fact that Poland had expressed her unwillingness to accept Soviet military assistance. With persistence worthy of better application, both missions, in the course of the Moscow talks, supported this position of Poland, utilising, among other things, the Polish assertion that consent to permit Soviet troops through the Polish territory might allegedly accelerate German aggression against Poland. The instructions,

¹ "Documents on British Foreign Policy," Vol. VI, Appendix V.

however, show that the British government itself did not consider this assertion at all convincing and regarded it as a pretext or excuse, enabling the Polish government to decline military assistance of the Soviet Union. Article 61 (b) leaves no doubt about it. It says: "The Poles do not want to enter into direct relations with Russia in peace time with a view to cooperation in war, pleading that this would be a provocation to Germany. This we regard as an excuse."¹

Rejecting the natural request of the Soviet Union, designed to provide the necessary conditions for a military rebuff to Hitler aggression, the Anglo-French politicians fully demonstrated their real aim: by frustrating the Moscow negotiations, to intimate to Hitler that the Soviet Union had no allies, that it was isolated and that, consequently, Hitler could attack it without the risk of counteraction on the part of Britain and France.

The Moscow negotiations failed first of all because their positive result did not suit the ruling circles of Great Britain and France. From the very beginning of the negotiations they regarded them as an auxiliary means for the attainment of a different aim: an agreement with Hitler Germany at the expense of the USSR, and against the USSR.

At that time preparations were already under way for extensive talks with Germany. These talks began in strict confidence in June 1939 through Hitler's four-year plan commissioner Helmuth Wohlthat who had come to London. He had talks with Minister of Overseas Trade Hudson and with Chamberlain's closest adviser G. Wil-

¹ Documents on British Foreign Policy, Vol. VI, Appendix V.

son. The negotiations between Wohlthat and the British statesmen continued in July and August, 1939. The German Ambassador in London Dirksen and Counsellor of the German Embassy Kordt also took part in these talks. Besides Hudson and Wilson, British Foreign Secretary Halifax took an active part in the talks. Lord Kemsley, Labourite Charles Roden Buxton, and other politicians also had conversations with the Hitler representatives. The talks were of a broad and far-reaching character.

A clear idea of the character and the aims of these talks is afforded by the documents published after World War II, and first of all the captured German documents published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR ("Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War," Vols. I-II).

The talks pursued the conclusion of a broad agreement which was to include an agreement for a world-wide division of the spheres of influence and the elimination of "deadly competition in common markets." The program discussed by the British and German representatives embraced political, military and economic problems. It envisaged that Germany would be allowed predominating influence in eastern and southeastern Europe.

Among the political questions special prominence was given, along with a pact of non-aggression, to a pact of non-intervention, which was to include "a delimitation of the spheres (*"grossräume"*) of the Great Powers, in particular as between Britain and Germany."¹ During the discussion of the questions involved in these

¹ "Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War," Vol. II. Dirksen Papers (1938-1939), No. 13.

two pacts the British representatives declared that the conclusion of a non-aggression pact would enable Great Britain "to rid herself of her commitments vis-à-vis Poland."¹ This signified that at a time when the ink with which Britain signed her guarantees to Poland had not yet dried the rulers of Britain were already prepared to surrender Poland to Hitler.

A clear idea of the character and aims of the London talks that were held in parallel with the Moscow negotiations is offered by the conversation between Horace Wilson and Dirksen on August 3, 1939.

Like all the Anglo-German talks at that time the conversation was strictly confidential. Wilson explained it by the fact that "Chamberlain would incur a great risk by starting confidential negotiations with the German government. If anything about them were to leak out there would be a grand scandal, and Chamberlain would probably be forced to resign."

In the course of this conversation Wilson repeated and developed his proposals which he had previously discussed with Wohlthat. Acting on behalf of the British government, Wilson in his proposals advanced the following program of a far-reaching Anglo-German agreement:

1) Conclusion of a treaty of non-aggression between Great Britain and Germany.

The hidden meaning of the British government regarding this point was plainly explained to Dirksen by Wilson by saying that the conclusion of such a pact "would completely absolve the British government from the commitments to which it was now pledged by the guaran-

¹ "Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War," Vol. II, Dirksen Papers 1938-1939, No. 13.

tees to Poland, Turkey, etc...."¹ To this it may be added that through Charles Roden Buxton's proposals Dirksen already knew of Britain's readiness in the event of her agreement with Germany to "bring influence to bear on France to get her to give up her alliance with the Soviet Union and her commitments in southeast Europe. She would also drop her treaty negotiations with the Soviet Union."¹

2) An Anglo-German declaration to the effect that both powers wanted to ease the political situation in order to make it possible "to cooperate in improving the world economic situation."²

3) Negotiations with a view to developing foreign trade.

4) Negotiations regarding Germany's economic interests in the southeast.

5) Negotiations regarding raw materials.

Wilson stressed that this was to include the colonial question, but he remarked that "it was not expedient at the present moment to go deeper into this matter, for it was a very delicate question."

6) A non-intervention agreement. Germany's non-intervention in the British Empire's affairs and Britain's non-intervention in respect to "Great Germany" ("Gross-Deutschland"), in other words, in respect to German claims to "Lebensraum" in east and southeast Europe.

7) Armaments. On this point Wilson told Dirksen that he wanted "to make it quite clear that it was

not disarmament that was meant, but negotiations regarding armaments in general."¹

Setting forth to Dirksen this extensive program of the Anglo-German agreement Wilson deemed it necessary to stress "the good will and initiative" of the British government in the negotiations with Wohlthat and Great Britain's readiness for further negotiations, and asked Dirksen that Hitler take the initiative of "a conciliatory statement." Here Wilson did not refrain from a flattering compliment to Hitler, calling him "not only a great, but also a successful statesman."²

Thus, behind peoples' backs and under the guise of none too subtle diplomatic manoeuvres ("guarantees" to small European countries, negotiations with the USSR, etc.), the British government of that time, and the French government agreeing with it, were plotting a compact with Hitler Germany.

Referring to the policy of England of that time, Harold L. Ickes had every ground to write: "England could have made terms with Russia long ago. She kept hoping against hope that she could embroil Russia and Germany with each other and thus escape scot-free herself. She got caught in her own toils and in so doing has lost the respect and the sympathy of the world generally."³

Documents relating to Anglo-German negotiations in June, July and August, 1939, conclusively show

¹ "Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War," Vol. II, Dirksen Papers (1938-1939) No. 24.

² Ibid.

³ The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes. Vol. II. The Inside Struggle. New York, 1954, p. 705.

¹ "Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War," Vol. II, Dirksen Papers, [(1938-1939) No. 24.

² Ibid., No. 22 and 29.

³ Ibid, No. 24.

that the aim of the British ruling circles was to conclude a firm agreement with Germany and "channel" German aggression to the East against whom they had but recently "guaranteed" Poland, and against the Soviet Union, with whom at that very time they were hypocritically negotiating a mutual assistance pact.

By secret compacts and deals, Great Britain, France and the USA sought to incite Hitler Germany against the Soviet Union, having previously isolated it on the international arena.

Under these circumstances the Soviet Union was faced with the alternative:

Either, in self-defence, to accept Germany's proposal for a pact of non-aggression, and thereby ensure the Soviet Union prolongation of peace for a certain period, which might be utilised to better prepare the forces of the Soviet state for resistance to eventual aggression.

Or to reject Germany's proposal for a non-aggression pact, and thereby allow the provocators of war in the camp of the western powers to embroil the Soviet Union immediately in an armed conflict with Germany, at a time when the situation was utterly unfavourable to the Soviet Union, seeing that it would be completely isolated.

Owing to the hostile policy of the Western powers the Soviet Union was compelled to make its choice and conclude a non-aggression pact with Germany.

The facts show that the Soviet Union invariably desired an alliance with the Western countries against the fascist aggressors so as to organise collective security on equal terms. But this was rejected by the governments of the Western countries, which preferred to pur-

sue a policy of isolating the Soviet Union, a policy of concessions to aggressors, a policy of directing aggression to the East, against the Soviet Union.

That the Soviet Union strove for the establishment of an anti-Hitler coalition on the eve of the second world war was clearly evident. It was well known in the West to those who dealt with the Soviet Union in the course of the Moscow negotiations. One of these men, General Palass, French military attaché in Moscow, in his report to the French Deputy Premier and Minister of National Defence Daladier on August 23, 1939, the day the Soviet-German pact was signed, wrote: "I continue to hold that for the USSR settlement of the question by an agreement with Germany is only a way out at the worst, and, perhaps, a means of pressure for the speedier establishment of a firm coalition, solidly welded in all its parts, a coalition which, as I have always believed, is desired by Soviet leaders."

Four days later, on August 27, 1939, the same General Palass wrote the following to Daladier regarding the attitude of the Soviet government: "I still believe that fearing excessive strengthening of Germany, it [the Soviet government], would prefer an agreement with France and Great Britain if only it could be achieved on terms clearly determined in the course of military negotiations."¹

The British and French governments did not wish to cooperate with the Soviet Union on the eve of the second world war in the establishment of an effective system of collective security against fascist aggression.

¹ Palass' reports were discovered in French archives captured by the Germans in their time, which later (among German archives) got into the hands of the Soviet Army.

Instead, they preferred pursuing the course of preparing a new but broader Munich. By secret negotiations they calculated to eliminate or at least to alleviate their contradictions with Hitler Germany and at the same time incite her against the Soviet Union, having previously isolated it on the international arena. The course of setting Germany and the Soviet Union at loggerheads was the chief foreign policy course of the Western powers in the period of the prewar European political crisis of 1939. The aim of this course was absolutely plain: to help Germany unleash a war against the Soviet Union, to force the USSR to wage war with Germany single-handed, and having achieved this to create conditions under which the Soviet-German war would mutually weaken them, and then the Western powers could appear on the scene with fresh strength and dictate their terms to the enfeebled belligerents.

Such calculations became so deeply rooted in the minds of Western reactionary politicians that even in June 1941, that is, almost two years after the outbreak of the war in Europe, some of them considered it possible to declare publicly their hopes that Germany and the USSR might mutually exhaust each other. Typical of this is the infamous statement of Truman (Senator at that time) on June 23, 1941, the day after Hitler Germany attacked the Soviet Union: "If we see that Germany is winning we ought to help Russia and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany and in that way let them kill as many as possible."¹ A similar statement was made in 1941 by Moore Brabson, then British Aircraft Minister. He said that so far as Great Britain

was concerned, the best issue of the struggle on the Eastern front would be a mutual exhaustion of Germany and the USSR, in consequence of which Great Britain would be able to assume a dominating position.

Pursuing the line of provoking a war between Germany and the Soviet Union, the ruling circles of the Western countries did not just calculate on mutual weakening of Germany and the Soviet Union. Their calculations went further. They hoped for the possibility of a military-political alliance with Germany against the USSR, calculating that the Western powers would assume the leading and guiding part in this alliance. But to implement these plans the Western reactionary politicians had first to come to terms with Hitler Germany on alleviating their economic and political contradictions. This, however, they failed to accomplish at that time. The contradictions proved to be irreconcilable.

In 1939 Hitler Germany felt strong enough to try by unleashing a war to gain a dominating position among the European capitalist countries and then also world supremacy.

In spite of all their hatred of the Soviet Union the Hitlerites could not but realize that the war against the Soviet Union would in all respects be much more difficult than that against Great Britain, France and their allies of that time. To wage a war against the Soviet Union Hitler Germany had first to get hold of all the economic resources of France and other European countries. The war against the Western countries and their subordination to Germany was regarded by the Hitlerites as a means for building up a military-political block of capitalist countries under the leadership

¹ "New York Times," June 24, 1941.

and in the interests of Germany, in the interests of establishing her world domination.

The European political crisis of 1939 revealed the utter bankruptcy of the policy of reviving Germany's war-industrial potential, the policy of "non-intervention" and of directing Hitler aggression against the Soviet Union. The contradictions inside the capitalist world, that had grown and matured over at least two decades, and the anti-Soviet policy of the ruling circles of the Western powers in the last analysis brought about the second world war. The war cost mankind too much for us to forget its causes.
